

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Immediate Release August 1, 1974

McGarvey 202/343-5634

PET OWNERS UNDULY ALARMED OVER PROPOSED WILDLIFE IMPORT REGULATION

False rumors circulating throughout the country have caused pet owners to become unduly alarmed over proposed new regulations on importing foreign animals into the United States, Lynn A. Greenwalt, Director of Interior's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said today.

"The proposed regulations," Greenwalt said, "are authorized under the Lacey Act of 1900 and are intended to prevent the importation of any animals that might be injurious to humans, agriculture, or the native environment. But unfortunately, the rumors have it that even dogs and cats would be prohibited from travel between the various states. Another rumor holds that all pets except dogs and cats would have to be given up. Neither rumor is true.

The facts are:

1. People with conventional domestic pets would not be affected in any way.
2. People with wild animal pets that are native to this country, such as snakes, would not be affected in any way.
3. People who now possess exotic (imported) pets would not be affected in any way.
4. The only pet fanciers who stand to be affected are those who might want to import exotic pets after the regulations go into effect. They would no longer be able to bring into the country pets which might be injurious to humans, agriculture, or the native environment. They would still be able to bring in many exotic pets which are on the "low hazard" list.

The Lacey Act, which is the basis for the new regulations, is the law which directs the Department of the Interior to protect various interests in this country from importation of injurious wildlife. It is not a new law, but the Interior Department is proposing new regulations that would accomplish more effectively what the law intended.

The regulations presently in effect allow importation of any animals that are not on a short list of injurious species. It is estimated that nearly a million living birds and mammals, larger numbers of reptiles and amphibians, and over 100 million living fish were imported into the U.S. last year. With so many animals being imported, the risk of bringing in an injurious species is very high.

A need to tighten these regulations has been recognized. In the past, animals have been placed on the "injurious" list only after a bad experience with the species proved that it should be there. Many unfortunate mistakes were made that can never be corrected. The English starling, the giant toad, the walking catfish, and others are examples.

The new regulations are intended to prevent future mistakes. Only those animals that have been determined to pose a low risk would be permitted to come into the country without restriction. All other animals would be carefully regulated, but could also come into the country under a special permit, issued only for zoological, scientific, medical, or educational purposes. No animals would be completely banned from importation.

Public hearings will be held at the following locations:

August 5, 1974

Auditorium
Department of the Interior
18th & C Streets, N.W.
Washington, D.C.
9 a.m. - 4 p.m.

August 5, 1974

Miami-Dade Community College
North Campus
Ten Players' Theater
11380 N.W. 27th Avenue
Miami, Florida
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

August 6, 1974

Crown Center Hotel
Centennial B. Room
1 Pershing Road
Kansas City, Missouri
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

August 9, 1974

Auditorium
Veterans' Memorial Building
Van Ness and McCallister
San Francisco, California
9 a.m. - 5 p.m.

Recently raised questions include:

ARE THESE REGULATIONS THE SAME AS THE ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT?

NO. These concern the Lacey Act of 1900 which has been amended several times. This Act charges the Department of the Interior with responsibility for regulating a number of wildlife activities including imports.

WHAT DAMAGE HAS IMPORTED WILDLIFE DONE?

Small turtles have caused 40,000 cases of salmonella poisoning annually. Monkeys have infected humans with tuberculosis and hepatitis. In 1972, viral Newcastle disease was found in flocks of chickens in California and in parrots and myna birds imported at that time. It was necessary to destroy 11 million chickens to prevent the spread of the disease. These are just a few examples. Animals can bite people, eat crops, compete with domestic fish and wildlife, spread disease in domestic flocks and herds, prey on native wildlife, and destroy native habitat.

WOULD THERE BE A COMPLETE BAN ON WILDLIFE IMPORTS?

NO. Domestic canaries and parrots are exempted from the regulations by the wording of the Lacey Act. Species known to be "low risk" could be imported freely. These include several common cage birds and mammals, several frogs, a large number of tropical fish, and some common mollusks and crustaceans used as food.

HOW DO I KNOW IF AN ANIMAL IS LOW RISK?

A list of species that are proposed to be classified as low risk was published in the Federal Register on December 20, 1973. These are animals about which there is evidence to show their risk to be low. These animals could be imported at will. Those not on the list would require a permit to be imported. After the list is approved, it can be amended if evidence shows a species should be added or deleted.

WOULD ANY ANIMALS BE RESTRICTED THAT PREVIOUSLY ENTERED FREELY?

The proposed regulations would reduce the number of birds imported by about 50 percent, mammals by about 45 percent, amphibians by about 15 percent, and fish by about three percent.

COULD I MOVE A PET FROM STATE TO STATE?

YES. The proposed regulations have nothing to do with interstate transportation except to and from Hawaii. Movement of species between the continental United States and Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the various island territories of the United States is treated as importation.

x x x